

A Sermon by Dr G Campbell Morgan preached at Westminster Chapel in
Central London, England, in January 1909

THE GRACE OF GIVING A MILLION SHILLINGS!

Scripture Lesson: 1 Corinthians xv.58—xvi.5; 2 Corinthians viii.1-16

“See that ye abound in this grace also.”

2 Corinthians viii. 7

THE passages read for our lesson had so evidently a local and immediate application that they seem to have very little value for us. I am glad that the local colouring has faded, because in proportion as that is so the lines which are vital and essential stand out in clearer relief. I need hardly remind you that if a great deal of this is of the nature of faded colour, there are things that none of us would care so to describe. For instance, no one would say that the colour is faded from this statement, “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich.” Because of that one verse the chapter is worth reading; worth reading if only to see the use the apostle makes of that great truth; for it is a significant fact that the verse with which we are all so familiar, the verse that is enshrined in the very heart of the Christian Church, is one that occurs in the midst of a chapter which we have admitted is full of local colouring. In that fact there is revealed a method of apostolic writing and teaching that I am very anxious we should constantly recognise; these New Testament teachers never dealt with local matters by local methods; they for ever more brought to bear upon the temporal, the eternal. Whenever they touched something that was the subject of a day or of an hour, they did it in the atmosphere and spirit of the eternities. Not merely when they wrote to saints, calling them to the life of full sanctification; not merely when they wrote the great document of human salvation; but when they wrote about the relation between husband and wife, between fathers and children, between masters and servants; and when they had to do with so commonplace a matter as a collection, they adopted the same method. They corrected the wrong things of the passing moment by bringing them to the measurements of the undying ages. All false conduct which they desired to set right, they approached with eternal and abiding principles.

Because I am desirous that we should understand the place of giving in Christian life, I want to speak of the New Testament ideal thereof.

The chapter from which the text is taken clearly sets forth that ideal. The source of Christian giving is suggested in the opening verse, “Brethren, we make known to you the grace of God which hath been given in the churches of Macedonia.” The grace of God bestowed upon His people is the source of all giving. The spirit of giving is also revealed. The Macedonian Christians were eager in their desire for fellowship. They gave beyond the expectation of the apostle, in that they gave themselves to God, and then gave themselves to the Lord’s service, and consequently, not merely out of their wealth but out of their poverty they gave more than they were able. The method of giving is revealed in the same words. They gave themselves, and their gifts followed. Finally, the great arguments for giving are stated. The first is that of the things they possessed, “Ye abound in everything.” Notice that the *everything* in the

apostolic thinking does not take into account what some men may have lacked, material wealth. “Ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all earnestness, and in your love to us.” Upon the basis of that abounding wealth he appealed to the Corinthian church, “See that ye abound in this grace also.” His final argument is that of the verse which we read, “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich.” The word here translated *poor* occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It is the strongest of which it is possible to make use. It indicates absolute pauperism. He became so poor that He had absolutely nothing more to give away. The local colouring has faded; thank God that it has; for the living figures and abiding principles and eternal realities flame upon the page in all the greater brilliance and radiance for the fading of the local colours.

Some five or six years ago, in a Northfield Conference, Mr. John Willis Baer, who was then Secretary for Christian Endeavour for the world, was conducting a question box. He took out of the box the question, How shall we raise money for Foreign Missions? His answer was as quick as the crack of a pistol, and as forceful; Don't raise it: give it. In that answer is the solution of the whole problem which confronts us at the present hour. If funds are lacking to carry on the work of God in the far distant places of the earth, it is because the Church has become so busy raising money that she has ceased to give it.

Every method for raising funds for Missions that is spectacular, and worldly, and commercial, I hold to be out of harmony with the will of God, and in the long issues calculated to hinder and not to help. If we can but return to the simple and profound principles of the New Testament in the matter of giving, we shall never have to call a halt, or beckon the workers back, in order that we may close fields into which they have entered because the Church at home is not conscious of an opportunity, or is not ready to sacrifice in order to enter a field.

What is the basic principle of giving? It is declared in one word which I have already quoted in this chapter. I take it out of its context. It does not belong only to this chapter, for it is stamped upon the pages of the New Testament. It is the word “*fellowship*.” “Beseeching us with much intreaty in regard of this grace and the fellowship.” If we may but come to an appreciation of the meaning of that word in all its applications, we shall have touched the profoundest basis. What is fellowship? Those of you who worship here regularly must be patient if I now repeat in this connection what I have said in other connections. The word translated “fellowship” is one of the richest words in the New Testament. So rich in suggestiveness is the Greek word *Koinonia*, that not even the revisers found it possible to express it in all connections by one English word. When I take up my New Testament I find the same Greek word is translated communion, communication, distribution, fellowship. I find, moreover, that its kindred word, *Koinonos*, is translated partaker, partner. Whereas there is something very dull in the repetition of a group of words like that, the very repetition helps us to see the richness of the word. There is one passage in the New Testament which admits us to the heart of its meaning. It occurs in connection with that fascinating picture of the early church, when it is declared that the disciples had “all things in common.” The Greek word so translated is the root from which our word fellowship comes. Fellowship with God, therefore, means that God has placed all His resources at our disposal, and that we—dare I say, have placed all our resources at His disposal? I dare not; I dare only say that we ought to place all our resources at His disposal. That is exactly what the apostle meant when he wrote to the Corinthian Christians, “We make known to you the grace of God . . . ye abound in everything . . . see that ye abound in this grace also.” The

grace of God to you is that He has put all His resources at your disposal. Your grace is to be manifested in that you put all your resources at His disposal. That is perfect fellowship. Tell me, if the whole Christian Church understood, and lived in the power of such fellowship, would there be any need to ask the patronage and help of godless men to carry on godly work? Would there be any need whatever to recall from the field loyal hearts who are suffering and serving, but who must be brought home owing to lack of funds? This is the difficulty. God has put all His resources at our disposal, but we have not put our resources at His disposal. That is the foundation principle that ought to underlie all Christian giving.

Let me break up that foundation principle into two working principles: "Ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price," and "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." If in the consciousness of fellowship with God, if in the activity of placing at His disposal all our resources, we remember that we ourselves are not our own, but His; and if in all the activities of everyday life we make His glory the one supreme, master-passion, then we are applying these working principles, and we shall find that they will produce all that is needed for the doing of God's work in the world.

The principle for practical application is found in the first passage I read. I think it is well that I should read the actual words again. "Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come." To me, to read that, and then to think of the habit of the Church in raising money, is to see how far we have wandered from the apostolic ideal. The only use the churches through this country seem to have to-day for the preacher is that he shall visit them in order that there may be a collection. Out of twenty-five letters I receive asking me to preach, I am safe in saying that twenty of them say, We are in need of funds, and your visit will enable us to raise them. The apostle says "that no collections be made when I come." In order that it may be so the true method of giving is stated. The giving of the Christian man is to be personal; let every man. It is to be regular; upon the first day of the week. It is to be perpetually readjusted; according as God has prospered. I hear a great deal about the tithing of incomes. I have no sympathy with the movement at all. A tenth in the case of one man is meanness, and in the case of another man is dishonesty. I know men to-day who are Christian men in city churches and village chapels, who have no business to give a tenth of their income to the work of God. They cannot afford it. I know other men who are giving one-tenth, and the nine-tenths they keep is doing harm to their souls.

Turning from the principles, I want to say a few words about laws and regulations. We are to arrange our substance as Christian people on the basis of recognition of the fact that all is His. Consequently, it is not that I am to give Him a tenth or a part, and hold the rest to spend according to the dictates of my own desire. The Christian man must recognise that not a tenth, but ten-tenths, belong to God. He has no right to spend anything save in accordance with the Divine will. May I put the case quite simply for the youngest Christian here. Out of my income I am to spend so much on food, clothing, shelter, mental culture, recreation, and all to the glory of God. If the method of my eating is not for the glory of God then I waste God's money. If the method of my dress is not according to the glory of God, then I violate the principle of Christian life and of Christian giving. I must do all to the glory of God. In order to giving directly and immediately to the actual work of God, therefore, there must be a recognition of stewardship, and that means careful disbursement, not only of your hundreds and thousands, or millions, but of your pence and shillings. We have no right to disburse money without investigation. If your conscience is not

at rest about a society you have no right to buy off a collector with a subscription. We need a new sense of stewardship in the heart and conscience of Christian people in all this matter.

If we lift this whole question on to this level certain things will happen. First of all, we shall be for ever at an end of spasmodic giving in this Missionary matter. When once the Church comes to the sense of responsibility on the basis of fellowship, and on the principle of stewardship, we shall never again hear of the annual Missionary Sunday. The whole of our churches are under the curse and ban of it, both in regard to information, inspiration, and giving. Systematic and regular giving will cancel all spasmodic giving, which creates crises, and hinders the work of God.

Again, if these principles once be recognised and acted upon there will be an end for ever of that carelessness which never readjusts conditions. There is someone who has been giving to a Missionary collector a guinea subscription for the last twenty years. Twenty years ago that man's income was not a fifth of what it is to-day, yet he is going on in the same way, a guinea a year! To come to the consideration of these things in the light of the New Testament ideal, will mean constant readjustment, sometimes lessening your giving in honesty, or increasing it in response to the increasing prosperity of the days.

If in the Christian Church at this hour in this country there could but be the realisation of this New Testament ideal and these New Testament principles, the result would be that of making for ever unnecessary all questionable methods of raising money. What is the reason that the Missionary Societies lack funds? Is it that the Church lacks fullness of life? Or is it that the Church has become lamentably ignorant of New Testament teaching? Or is it both? Are not these two things very closely inter-related?

In a word or two let me illustrate the application of these principles. I maintain that every Christian Church should put first things first. I maintain that it is of the very essence of the Church's life that the first of her income should be spent, not on herself but on the work of her Lord, and not on the work of her Lord at her doors, but on the work of her Lord in the far distant places of the earth. It is not for any reason of sentiment or purpose of boastfulness, but because we believe it is the Divine order, that out of all collections taken in this Church the first tenth is set aside for Missionary work. As I say to my friends in the provinces when they come to Westminster and put a sovereign on the plate, two shillings of it goes to Missionary work beyond our own borders.

There is a peril in that which we need to recognise and avoid. The peril is that when this is done the Christian men and women in the church may imagine that their individual responsibility is fulfilled. By no means. I pray you think carefully; if we had not tithed our income for these three years would you have given any less to the collection? I trow not. Your giving has been the giving of your worship, your expression of gratitude to God for the benefits He has conferred upon you. The giving of the tithe is the giving of the corporate church, and not the giving of the individual members. Think of it carefully, and see that your individual responsibility abides. Tithing of collections must not be allowed to weaken personal responsibility.

As in the Church life first things should be put first, so also in personal stewardship, first things must be put first. Note that the Corinthians did this. Paul says, "Now concerning the collection." When?

Immediately after the great passage on the resurrection, the chapter of the final issues of Christ and Christianity, the chapter that climbs the heights until the challenge to death is heard; "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not vain in the Lord. Now concerning the collection." Put the collection in the full tide of your spiritual life. Put the collection in full relationship to the highest, noblest doctrines of the faith. Hold your offering in the supernal light of the resurrection of the Son of God. Put your giving in relation to the life that was won out of death.

The inspiration of giving must be the grace of God, the love of God. There comes back to me a story, I cannot forbear telling it even though perchance I may have told it before, because it had such an effect upon my own life. Hudson Taylor told me this story the last time I saw him in this world, the story of how, long years ago, there came into his room, on his birthday morning his own little girl, and she brought in her hand a most mysterious looking arrangement, so mysterious that Hudson Taylor did not at all know what it was. She said, I have brought you a birthday present. He took it in his hand and looked at it. It was a matchbox, into one end of which she had driven a knitting needle, and into the other end a pin, and had somehow fastened some cotton to the pin and to the top of the knitting needle. Being only a man, and not a mother, he said to his girlie, Well, darling, what is this? Oh, father dear, she said, I knew it was what you would like. It is a Missionary ship.

There is the whole philosophy of Christian giving. The heart of the child knew full well the love of her father's heart, knew that the thing he most longed to possess was a ship, and she made one for him. There is no one in this congregation who will dare to laugh at that Missionary ship.

The years passed, and there came a day when the girl had grown to womanhood, and once again she came to her father in China on his birthday, and she said, Father dear, I have brought you something for your birthday, and he said, What is it? I want to introduce to you the first Chinese woman that God has used me to lead to Christ. The potentiality of that Chinese convert lay in that matchbox, knitting needle and pin.

There is the plane of Christian giving. What does God want? What is His heart set upon? Before every present you buy which is worth anything, you say: I wonder what he wants. I wonder what would please her. That is the true genius of giving. That is what the child did before she made the ship. Such giving comes out of real love.

If we could but get the Church here! If instead of desiring to keep up an appearance of respectability there were a great, passionate, surging love for God and the things that God loves, all our financial problems would be at an end, and then as young men and maidens come up and ask to be sent out—and they are coming all the time—we should not have to tell them there is no place for them, no method of training them, but out of the fullness of funds we could get them ready, and send them forth to the work of evangelising the world.

My last word to you is of our own Society in this respect. Doubtless many of you know that the London Missionary Society is asking that before the last day of March there should be given to it from the churches of our order a million shillings. I know perfectly well how easily people say, Another appeal! and down it goes into the waste-paper basket.

I wish you would think about that appeal. What does it mean? It is an appeal for money to wipe out a deficiency which at the present moment is £37,000, and before the end of the year in all probability will be £50,000. How has this deficiency come about? I reply at once, the deficiency is due to the success of the work. The deficiency is due to the fact that God has answered prayer and blessed the workers. We have sent forth workers into the distant fields. They have succeeded. If they had failed there would be no deficiency. I want you to carefully think of this when you are facing the subject of Missionary giving, that planting a missionary, or a mission station, means not merely the amount needed to support him or it for a year, but more the next year, and more the following year if he succeeds. I have in my hand an article which appears in the January number of the London Missionary Society's *Chronicle*, in connection with this appeal, which I propose quoting to you. It puts the whole case in a nutshell. The writer says:—

“The deficits have occurred because the Board has been sanguine enough to ‘Budget for a Rise’ in its income, which ‘rise’ has not been realised, at least to the extent anticipated. But surely, after such experience, twice or thrice repeated, this habit of ‘Budgeting for a Rise’ ought to have been discredited? Well, the Directors have, after all, but afforded another example of the triumph of Hope over Experience. Though having had experience that the income had not risen as expected, they still hoped that it would do so. Who can blame them for persisting, at least for a while, in the belief that the churches would not allow the rose tree to be cut down on the very day when it was blossoming?”

That is the whole story of the deficiency. Do not blame the Mission House. You business men, if you are at all anxious about the Mission House, investigate its methods and discover that the cost of administration in the London Missionary Society is under two shillings in the pound, which amount includes all secretaries' salaries, the whole administration, and the cost of all the literature issued. It is a smaller amount than is spent by any of the other large Missionary Societies. Do not blame the Mission House. Do not blame the Missionaries for succeeding. Blame the Church, that she is out of fellowship with her Lord, that she is not true to the doctrine of fellowship, that while God has placed all His resources at her disposal, she has not placed all her resources at His disposal.

Supposing these million shillings are not forthcoming, what then? The result must be curtailment. There must be the closing of some part of the field that we are at present occupying. It means cutting down the rose tree somewhere in the day of its blossoming! Is that to be our reply to the opening doors of opportunity?

I came, as you know, back to my work this winter from one month spent in going to different places on this great Missionary enterprise. When I went out for that month's campaign, I stipulated, as did my brethren, that I was not to talk about money. I did that because I believed, as I still do believe, that the true way of dealing with the financial problem is by deepening the spiritual life of the Christian Church; but when the hour has come that the Board has to consider whether it must cease work begun, and call men

and women home, in the name of God it is time we spoke of finance; and I have tried to put this subject where I think it ought to be put, on the highest level and on the profoundest foundations.

And what does it all come to in the end? What is to be the reply of this congregation to that appeal? In the light of that appeal, as it covers the churches of England and Wales, before the end of March, in addition to the subscriptions of our members, in addition to the tithe, we at Westminster ought to send to the Mission House £200. It could be done, it will be done without any difficulty, if we all will put this matter on the basis of the New Testament ideals. Let no youth or maiden, no man or woman, who can only give out of poverty, withhold the shilling because it is only a shilling: and let those whom God has blessed with more, exercise that same function of stewardship, and give as in the presence of your Lord.

To me it would be almost heartbreaking if we had to close any field, or call back any workers when as never before the Master is opening up the world and bidding us enter in. It would be to the great joy of my heart if this congregation made its response without any organised collecting. I very much shrink from that. I hope it will not be necessary. If we will all send in our penny or sixpence, or shilling, or pounds, or scores or hundreds of pounds, during the next three months it will easily be accomplished.

I do desire that at Westminster, where God has so graciously blessed us, we shall make our response to our Society and help them at this time.

I thank you for the patience with which you have heard me. Believe me, I have spoken out of my heart. I now leave the matter with you.

This text is taken from 'The Westminster Pulpit', volume 4.